

Contributions

ANNUAL SERMON

Delivered at Winona Lake Conference, Friday evening, August 31, 1900 by J. H. Knepper. The Lord hath done great things for us: Wherefore we are glad. Psalms 126:3.

Beloved Elders, Delegates and Brethren:—

In as much as God our Heavenly Father, thru a well directed train of his providence and care, and in as much as Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior has granted unto us mercy and grace by which we have been kept; And in as much as the Holy Spirit has guided and comforted us, we are here and permitted again to meet in the brotherly councils of the National Conference of our much beloved brotherhood. By the help and goodness of Him whose never failing Providence orders all things both in heaven and earth, the brotherhood has been preserved. It is meet therefore that we make grateful acknowledgement and today "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him and bless his name" for truly "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad."

The universe in which we live is a vast archive stored with the numberless records of Gods dealings with the human family. Beginning amidst the smoke and thunders and lightnings of Mount Sinai we trace the impress of the finger of the Almighty on the tables of stone making record. All things, all mankind are making record for future ages, the individual, the Nation, the Church, all record making, here we might well pause for a moment, and ask, What is my individual record? Oh, this theme of making and keeping the records is a sublime one. It is nothing less than God's own thought and plan, else there had been no "recording angle" no "Lambs Book of Life" no "Book of Holy Writ"—God's own Word—the one and only infalable and true record, our creed. May we ever be faithful and obedient learners from this Holy Record while in our mission herebelow and when life with its labors are ended here be permitted to become students of Father's great records on high.

But what of the records of the Brethren Church, are they such that we can recall them with profit? Can we review them with joy? It is well sometimes to have those records brought in review before us. Moses, the great Hebrew law giver and leader, well understood the benefits of reviewing the past when in that long and heart touching farewell address to his peculiar, yet much beloved people, he exclaimed, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness." Beloved it is less than half of forty years since we shook off the galling blistering yoke of the Pharaoh of Annual meeting mandates and re-affirmed the Bible alone doctrine of the fathers of the Church, and banded together hand in hand started afresh toward the Celestial Caanan.

We are scarcely yet well on the way, but

thus far we have been miraculously led, and are ready to chant the song of Moses with his prophetic sister Miriam. "Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously." Enemies have met us here and there by the way in our journey, but they were thus far overwheeled in the Red sea: we were now and then brought to taste of the bitter waters, but they have been made sweet, our thirst has been quenched at the smitten Rock for that was Christ. We have not only been fed on "Manna" but we have feasted upon the sincere milk of the word" and have "grown thereby" Yea we have eaten of that living bread that came down from heaven whereof if a man eat he shall live forever.

Then who will blame us if we to-day as a Conference climb high the Delectable Mountains for at least a glimpse of the memorials we have helped to rear and the golden sheaves of progress and success we have helped to garner.

Our denominational, educational institution known as Ashland University, which at a time in the near past was burdened with a debt large enough comparatively speaking to discomfit a Wall Street Magnate of no mean standing, has been provided for, and to-day Ashland University is the unencumbered property of the brotherhood, and with her consecrated and highly esteemed faculty is doing a great and glorious work for Christ and his Church in educating, training and indoctrinating men and women for the ministry of the Word. The call and demand of the hour upon the church at large from this institution of learning is for students and for endowment which call merits prompt and generous response.

The progress, development and growth of our church and Sunday school literature is marvelous in our eyes, especially is this so of the Sunday-school literature, when we remember that Conference at this place in its sessions of 1893 seven short years ago appointed a Committee of three Brethren to compile edit and publish a Sunday-school literature.

And said Committee, without a dollar of money provided by Conference, did in a few months time prepare and publish a lesson quarterly, papers, etc., that in the short seven years has developed into a Sunday-school literature equal too and surpassed by but few, if indeed by any. Surely our publication board is deserving the liberal patronage of every Sunday-school and individual in the brotherhood.

Our capable and efficient Missionary Board has made commendable progress all along the line, practically inaugurating the work and pushing the same with a lively zeal especially so in Washington, the capital city of our Nation, securing there by purchase within the last year a well located and commodious house of worship. The thanks of the Church are due the board, the prayers of every child of God should earnestly ascend the hill of the Lord in the board's behalf and the shekels should flow in a living stream from our pockets in to the board's treasury.

There has been a steady, sure and healthy increase in membership thru-out the borders of conference which speaks well for and indicates a faithful, consecrated ministry, a ministry which in less than a score of years has forged its way to respectable recognition among ministers of all other denominations from a position under the former regime, scarcely recognized by others as ministers. To all and for all our hearts feel to acknowledge. "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad." It is our good fortune to live in a prosperous and promising time of our churches' history. I know we are told time and again that we are living in a time of great religious degeneracy; I know that contrasts are drawn between the lofty zeal and religious enthusiasm of former days and the assumed lukewarmness and spiritual decline of our day. But I do not sympathize with the cry of the pessimist, I do not accept the unfavorable comparison of the present with the past. The spirit that holds up the former times and the fathers of the church for our example and admiration is altogether right and none shall exceed me in doing so. But when it elevates the fathers by decrying the sons and when it glorifies the past to bewail the present it is time to call a halt and I call it now. The onward march of time has been the march of both moral and religious progress. We are growing better as we are growing older. Never before was the opportunity for education, religious investigation and religious training so great and so widely diffused as now, never before was the right of independent judgment so freely exercised as now; never before did bigotry and passion in church or society exert so little influence as now and never before did philanthropy and charity throw so far and so wide the mantle of their sweetness and light as now. Never before did woman (God bless her) occupy a position of equality with man as now and never before has woman's work as a true helpmate exerted an influence in church and society as now. And yet I believe we are standing in a present and looking to a future that will surpass in light and progress as the electric light outshines the tallow dip and as the limited royal blue express outspeeds the snail-like pace of the stage coach. What then is the duty of the hour? I answer, To do with all our might what our hands find to do. The Brethren church has a great mission to achieve, namely, to preach and teach in season and out of season the distinctive features of her gospel alone doctrine. To this end triune immersion, the apostolic mode of Christian baptism, must be rigidly maintained. Feet-washing, as instituted by Christ and by him commanded to be perpetuated, when he said, "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you" "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." This must be faithfully taught and personally practiced.

Likewise the Agapæ, feast of Charity or Lord's Supper and the Eucharist or Com-